discussion bulletin

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Draft Resolution on Cuba

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Draft Statement on the Cuban Revolution

1. Cuba is a workers' state. The decisive step in establishing the workers' state in Cuba was taken with the expropriation of the vast majority of foreign and native capital and the nationalization of basic industry, transportation, communications, financial institutions and services, i.e., the overturn of **capitalist property relations** and the institution of **nationalized property relations** similar to those existing in the Soviet Union. A monopoly of foreign trade has bean established; further, the graet majority of trade is with the workers' states, principally the USSR, and the Cuban economy has achieved a large degree of integration with the economies of the other workers' states.

2. We maintain that the institution of nationalized property relations and monopoly of foreign trade are the **central criteria** in establishing whether Cuba or any other state is a workers' state. Marxism has always held that the **base** of any given society is the property relations existing in that society, and that the base is paramount in determining the social structure and character of that society.

3, The Cuban state meets the above criteria in full and without qualification. Any argument to the contrary flies in the face of universally accepted reality. Any analysis of the Cuban state that fails to accept this reality and to deal with it cannot but be based on a methodology alien to that of dialectical materialism. There is no common ground for evaluating any phenomenon unless there is agreement in the **facts**; the **interpretation** of the facts is of course a different question. If alleged contradictions exist between the facts and the theory, then it is the theory which must be reconciled to the facts and not vice versa. To proceed in the opposite direction is to fall into the trap of metaphysics.

4. We do not agree that (institutionalized) workers' control is an essential criterion in establishing whether or not a state is a workers' state. The political institutions of a society are part of the **superstructure** of that society; the **base** of the society consists of the property forms. The classes that exist in the society grew out of and reflect these property forms. As in the case of the Soviet Union, however, it is possible for a social stratum (the bureaucracy) which is NOT a class, although possessing some of the characteristics of a class, to develop and even to expropriate political power and to a large degree determine the political forms of rule. Recognizing that the existence of such a stratum is a transitory historical phenomenon produced by specific conditions at a particular juncture, our movement holds the position that this stratum is not a necessary or inevitable product of nationalized property relations. Flowing from this, the political forms of rule adapted by such a stratum are not a reflection of the property forms, but of specific conditions and pressures, internal and external, existing in a specific historical period. Thus the political forms of rule cannot be considered pivotal in defining the nature of such a state. If in fact they were, then the Soviet Union then ceased long ago to be a workers' state; further our characterization of the Eastern European countries, China and Yugoslavia as workers' states at any time was and is invalid. It can't be had two ways: either the criteria in

defining a workers' state are universally valid or they are not valid at all.

5. We also cannot agree with the concept that nationalization of the land is a criterion in defining a workers' state. If that were accepted, then again some of the Eastern European states are not workers' states, and the Soviet Union and China did not become workers' states until the collectivisation of agriculture took place. It must be noted here that those who argue that nationalization of the land is a criterion in determining whether or not Cuba is a workers' state have signally failed to apply that criterion elsewhere. But even if their view on this question was correct, Cuba has already met this demand. As a result of the recent conversion of most of the co-operatives into state farms, far more than half the land in Cuba is owned directly by the state. The remainder of the land is largely divided into small individual peasant holdings. These cannot be bought, sold or rented by law; they can only be passed from the hands of the present owners through inheritance by their direct hiers or into the ownership of the state.

6. While the exact nature of the Cuban workers' state has yet to be determined in the process of further development, there is no justification for labeling this state as deformed. Deformation as we have previously defined it consists, not simply of deformation or deficiency in the political forms of rule, but in the existence of a parasitic social stratum which politically expropriates the masses and which rules with the principal objective of advancing its own interests separate and apart from the overall interests of the workers' state. While bureaucratic tendencies have existed, and to one degree or another probably continue to exist in Cuba (as they are likely to do in any colonial country becoming a workers' state in this period) there is no evidence to suggest that a bureaucracy has taken power in Cuba, or that in fact any immediate danger in that direction exists. On the contrary, the leadership of revolutionary Cuba, centered around Fidel Castro and the leaders of the July 26th Movement has shown itself to be a principled revolutionary leadership Intensely hostile to manifestations of bureaucracy or privilege.

7. The most powerful demonstration of the attitude of the Cuban leaders on this question is their conduct with regard to the attempts by old Stalinists of the PSP, led by Anibal Escalante, to create a bureaucratic apparatus through the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (0RI). At the time of writing evidence indicates that the purge of careerists and privilege-seekers in the apparatus of the Cuban state is continuing. We are not aware of any evidence that any definite privileged social stratum has formed, or is in the process of formation in Cuba, let alone that it has the capacity to seize power and carry out a political counterrevolution as did Stalinism in the USSR. All that has been raised as “evidence” of deformation are a series of relatively minor bureaucratic abuses carried out by second and third-rank functionaries, the majority of were presumably allied with the Escalante clique, which is still in the process of being liquidated.

8. All the foregoing does not invalidate the fact that the most serious internal weakness of the Cuban Revolution is the lack of formally recognized and institutionalized forms of workers' democracy. But only those who have turned aside from the concrete reality can ignore the remarkable sensitivity and responsiveness of the Cuban regime to the masses, its consistent honesty in terms of its policy and the results of its policy. Nor can a responsible revolutionary socialist ignore the embryonic forms of workers' control that already exist in some areas of Cuban society. It is true that they are not uniform, not formally recognized or universally applied and therefore not sufficient. And while it is crystal clear that the leadership if extremely sensitive and responsive to the masses, that is not sufficient either.

But all the evidence indicates to us that Cuba is moving in the direction of institutionalizing workers' democracy and not away from it. What then is the responsibility of Trotskyists in such a situation? To encourage the Cubans in this direction, to welcome the advances that have been made, and to make our opinion known that the creation of such forms is ultimately essential to the continued healthy development of the workers' state? Certainly. But it is no responsibility of ours to determine the time schedule, to lay down the manner in which this should be accomplished. If we wish to offer advice or criticism to the Cuban revolutionaries it should be done in a spirit of fraternal communication – and with a little caution and tact. While some Cuban Trotskyists did in fact fight with the Fidelistas in the hills, from the very beginning, it was not our movement that carried out this socialist revolution.

9. In our opinion, the Cuban revolution has again confirmed the Theory of Permanent Revolution in its main essentials. We reject the position held by certain comrades that since the experience of the revolution does not fall entirely within the framework of previous theoretical projections we must therefore pretend that the overthrow of capitalism in Cuba did not take place. To take that course is to turn the living organism of Marxist theory into a sterile dogmatism unrelated to the material world. The possibility of the seizure of power in a colonial country by what has correctly been defined as a Workers' and Farmers' government not under the hegemony of a Marxist Vanguard party was previously projected. Not unforeseen was the possibility of such a leadership of petty-bourgeois origins carrying the revolution forward to such an advanced stage. Well then it is necessary to incorporate this experience, and the possibility of its repetition into our theoretical arsenal. One would think that any Trotskyist would welcome such a development. From some sections of our movement, however, we hear instead great weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. And what has produced all this uproar? It seems that if we are to take the elementary action of recognizing facts when we see them we have thrown the need for construction of Marxist-Leninist parties overboard and the historical mission of the Trotskyist movement with it.

On the contrary, what the Cuban revolution has established, in our opinion, is that the seizure of power from imperialism in a colonial nation is **possible** without the existence of a Marxist vanguard party at that stage, that the leadership of such a revolution can originate outside the working class, and that the peasantry and agricultural proletariat can provide the initial forces. This must also be considered in the context of the world situation today as opposed to that prior to World War 2. The global relationship of class forces has been substantially altered by the emergence of new workers' states, the enormous growth of the economic, political and military weight of the Soviet Union, and the forward sweep of the colonial revolution which has taken the momentum away from world imperialism. Whatever speculation can be made about the motives of the Soviet bureaucracy there is no questioning the fact that Soviet aid has enabled Cuba to maintain itself under fantastic pressures.

That does not at all invalidate the imperative necessity of constructing a Marxist-Leninist party to carry the revolution through, for the consolidation and extension of the revolution. This has at least been partly realized by the Cuban leadership, which has openly proclaimed itself Marxist-Leninist and declared that Marxism-Leninism is the ideology of the revolution. From the very beginning the Castro leadership had to move in this direction in order simply to carry out its

original bourgeois-democratic program. In order to implement the agrarian reform it had to liquidate the old state apparatus, including the army which it replaced with the popular militia, and base itself firmly on the working class in alliance with the peasantry. In order to maintain itself against imperialism it had to liquidate the Cuban bourgeoisie and seize their holdings, as well as those possessed by imperialism abroad. All this it has done – and more.

The Cuban experience does not at all mean that we junk the perspective of building revolutionary parties in the colonial countries. What is does mean is that we must absorb the lessons of Cuba and incorporate them into our strategy and tactics in constructing these parties, that we work with tendencies similar to those represented by Cuba's July 26th Movement and seek to win them to our full program. That is in fact what a number of Trotskyist forces in Latin America are already doing. While the seizure of power in such countries may be **possible** without a conscious Marxist vanguard at the helm, it is far less certain, less secure, if it takes place in such a context, and the chances are far greater that the future direction will be imperiled. There were several turning points in Cuba where the lack of a cohesive class conscious leadership and party posed grave dangers that the revolution would turn the wrong way and destroy itself.

In view of that, the record of Fidel Castro and the July 26th Movement is all the more magnificent. It is true that they made mistakes (and what revolutionary leadership has not made mistakes?) but at every major turning point the revolution confronted, they made the correct decisions and implemented them without hesitation. The Cuban leadership has its weaknesses and theoretical deficiencies, but these are far outweighed by its great strengths. Our responsibility is to assist this proven and committed force to overcome these weaknesses and deficiencies where they may exist, and criticize where criticism is required. But let us also recognize that there is much we can learn from the Cubans. **They have carried out a socialist revolution.** That's no small matter after all. And while through no fault of our own, we cannot claim similar distinction, even if we do as a world movement come politically in a straight line from Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party. The Cubans will not be impressed with pedantry, scholasticism and sectarian pronunciamentos. What is required is fraternal communication and collaboration with this and other new revolutionary forces developing essentially in our direction. The Cuban revolution is in the fullest sense our resolution and we have a big contribution to make to it. It would be a disaster if blind factionalism and sectarianism were permitted to block this opportunity. It cannot be allowed to happen.

10. We regard the Cuban revolution as the opening stage of socialist advance in the Western hemisphere. The splendid example of Cuba has inspired and revitalized the revolutionary masses of Latin America and has assisted substantially in the emergence of the revolutionary forces moving in the direction of Trotskyism, as well as the growth of actual Trotskyist parties on that continent. This process is reinforced by the open recognition of the Castro leadership that the salvation of Cuba is in the extension of the revolution, and its efforts directed toward that extension. Whatever criticisms can be made, the Cubans have unequivocally called for socialist revolutions in Latin America and have condemned in no uncertain terms the opportunist and reformist politics that characterize the Communist Parties there. The Caribbean crisis precipitated by Kennedy is unquestionable confirmation of the strategic character of the Cuban victory over imperialism.

The revolution also has profound repercussions in North America. The establishment of a workers' state under a leadership completely independent from Stalinism, and a society generally free of the distortions and evils of Soviet society has presented revolutionary socialists with important opportunities for attracting new elements into their ranks and expanding their cadres, as well as giving renewed perspective to older elements previously demoralized and withdrawn from the struggle. With the developing economic crisis in North American society whole layers of workers and youth will be enabled to see through the tissue of lies constructed by the capitalist propaganda network to take a searching look at what is really happening.

Even now, while the nuclear confrontation of the US and USSR over, Cuba may not have directly increased the numbers of Cuba's supporters in North America, it has brought into sharper focus than ever before what an atomic war would really mean to the North American masses.

11. The Cuban revolution remains in grave danger, not from internal difficulties, but from the imminent threat of imperialist aggression and the failure to date of any successful revolts to take place in the remainder of Latin America. The first and elementary duty of Trotskyists therefore is to defend the revolution with all the resources at their command, not only as against imperialism, but as a socialist revolution. And the way to defend it is to tell the truth about what it is and what it signifies. Any other course would be in complete contradiction to the principles and traditions on which our international movement is based and would put us on a collision course with political suicide.